

DISB endorsement and thoughts on the proposed final draft of the Delta Stewardship Council Delta Science Program's Delta Science Plan

An initial proposed draft

The Delta Independent Science Board is extremely pleased that the Delta Stewardship Council Delta Science Program has developed an integrative Science Plan for issues related to the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta. The lack of coordination of scientific and technical work among and within state, federal, and local agencies regarding the Delta has long hindered the transparent development of coherent and effective policies and management regarding the Delta.

This initial Delta Science Plan is a very significant advance toward the kind of integrated scientific activity called for by the National Research Council in 2012 and other independent reviews of the Delta and its problems. It provides a foundation for the organization of scientific and technical activities regarding the Delta across and within state, federal, and local agencies, as well as nongovernmental and academic research entities.

To move this plan forward and make it successful will require a high level of political and financial support. Particularly in its early days, this support must come from elected officials in the legislature and state government, as well as appointed political leaders in state and federal regulatory and administrative agencies.

At the state level, it is necessary that the leadership of the Delta Stewardship Council, State Water Resources Control Board, California Department of Water Resources, California Department of Fish and Wildlife, Delta Conservancy, Delta Protection Commission, California Resources Agency, and California Environmental Protection Agency substantively endorse and commit resources to the implementation of the Delta Science Plan, under the leadership of the Governor and the California State Legislature.

At the federal level, it is similarly necessary for the Department of Interior, USEPA, NOAA, and the US Army Corps of Engineers to also endorse and commit resources to the implementation of the Plan.

Local agencies large enough to support scientific efforts, such as those organized under the State and Federal Water Contractors Agency, Sacramento Regional County Sanitation District wastewater treatment agency, and other public and private entities impacting Delta resources with significant science capacity of their own should also be expected to endorse and contribute substantively (and financially) to implementation of the Science Plan.

State and federal regulatory authorities, in particular, should provide incentives and expectations for the development and resolution of scientific information within the frameworks available under the Delta Science Plan. Such actions should improve

regulatory functions and the ability of courts to have, and expect, more broadly supported scientific and technical information and syntheses in resolving disputes.

Implementation of the science plan also will require day-to-day leadership, funding, and expectations of timely and scheduled performance. We recommend expeditious development of an implementation schedule and budget, with assignment of individual and agency responsibilities for accomplishments. Recognizing the limitations of available leadership and funding, this will require a wise prioritization of the many actions proposed in the science plan. It is important that a central core of science plan actions succeed in a timely way, rather than merely accomplishing an endless series of distracting and empty meetings on all activities mentioned in the plan (a common pathology in California water policy and management).

This Delta Science Plan is not perfect, but it can be an effective start. Any science plan, like science itself, will be imperfect, evolving, and subject to disputes. But there is little doubt that Delta science will be much better off with an effective science plan, just as Delta management will be much better off if informed by better scientific information and synthesis that will result from the success of such a plan.

The DISB looks forward to its role in seeing the Delta Science Plan move forward and in continuing to review the quality and effectiveness of the development and application of science for the Delta's problems.